

# GET THE PICTURE!

For Joyce and Frank Burek, getting the picture is the whole idea. Since 1983 they have been diving and photographing the sanctuary and its staff both above and below the water, which means they've actually been photographing the Flower Garden Banks since before it became a sanctuary!

## THE BEGINNING

How did it all begin? How did two New Jersey natives become nature photographers in Texas? (harp music please...dream sequence begins...)

The first thing they will both tell you is that they are Texans by choice! All it took was one visit back in 1972, and off to Texas they ran. They have been happy Houston residents ever since.

As for photography, Frank will tell you, "The camera came with the marriage." Joyce had done photography since she was a child and convinced Frank to take his first stab at it during his tour in Vietnam. While there, he bought one of their "good" cameras. Upon his return, they decided to make it a shared hobby and eventually a business.

Of course, starting any business can be difficult and financially challenging as well. So, Frank and Joyce started the business while they were both still working full time. Once the business took off, they each retired and made photography their career.

## UNDERWATER WILDLIFE

Photography wasn't originally an underwater adventure for Joyce and Frank, but a trip to the Virgin Islands in 1979 changed all of that. A snorkel trip to the reefs sent Joyce looking for an EWA housing, basically a lens with a plastic bag and a glove to reach the controls. This was an inexpensive way to get started in underwater photography, but didn't allow her to do all that she wanted.

Joyce and Frank decided then and there that they wanted to SCUBA dive. And, boy, have they! Each of them now has over 2000 dives with cameras—over 400 just in the Flower Garden Banks NMS.

## SANCTUARY SUPPORTERS

The Burek's first involvement with the Flower Garden Banks NMS started with the establishment of the sanctuary. Frank was asked to photograph the opening event and also submitted some underwater photos for the first sanctuary calendar.

Joyce and Frank went on their first sanctuary sponsored dive trip for the coral spawning in 1994 and have been diving with the sanctuary ever since. To date,

they have photographed 369 different species within the sanctuary, and the list keeps growing. On one recent trip, they photographed another 4-5 species that will be added to the list of what is known to be in the sanctuary.

The Bureks diligence in finding and photographing animals within the sanctuary has been very helpful. Their photographs have been used to help identify species new to science and provide proof that certain species do exist within the sanctuary. Some of their photographs may also help us track the spread of an invasive species, *tubastrea coccinea*, the orange cup coral, throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

### **FAVORITE PHOTOGRAPHS**

So, what is it they like to photograph the most underwater? Frank is quick to say sea cucumbers, while Joyce mentions the sea turtles. But, both quickly mention the manta rays, as well.

Often, the two focus on completely different subjects within the same dive. Joyce prefers to do macro-photography, focusing in on the small, unobtrusive critters of the reef, while Frank focuses more on the big picture. After each dive, they compare photos, at least partly to see what one of them saw but the other one missed. They often find interesting things in the background of many photos, too. As Joyce states, "It's thrilling to find something new."

### **ANIMALS OF THE REEF**

The Flower Garden Banks may not be the only place Joyce and Frank dive, but they will tell you that it is probably the best in the western Caribbean. "It's a very healthy reef, and during a typical sport diving season it has good visibility and the opportunity to see larger animals."

This is something they try to share with others through their *Marine Life of the Flower Garden Banks NMS* CDs which they update every year.

### **VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR – 2005**

In recognition of their years of service to the sanctuary, Joyce and Frank were named the Flower Garden Banks NMS Volunteers of the year for 2005. This was our way of saying thank you to two people who have given tremendous support to science in the sanctuary and how we are able to share it with others.

So, next time you read a Flower Garden Banks NMS publication or visit the FGBNMS website, take a look at the photo credits. You might just find yourself looking at one of the 5300 photographs that the Bureks have donated to the sanctuary. Get the picture?

For more information about Joyce and Frank Burek's images, visit [www.azurephoto.com](http://www.azurephoto.com) or email them at [info@azurephoto.com](mailto:info@azurephoto.com).